

Middletown School Readiness Council
12:00 P.M. - 1:30 P.M.
Wednesday, January 20, 2016
Wilbert Snow School
299 Wadsworth St.
Middletown, CT 06457

Members Present: Alice Torres, Ed Bonilla, Jessica Stewart, Sheila Daniels, Wendy Berlind, Kitty Robinson, Monica Belyea, Amy Waterman, Beverly Lawrence, Christine O'Grady, Donna Marino, Patricia Charles, Jim Gaudreau, Susan Sienkiewicz, Jennifer Cannata and Liz Fraser.

I. Welcome & Call to Order: Ed Bonilla opened the meeting at 12:13P.M. welcoming everyone. Introductions were made. Welcome back Alice Torres after knee surgery.

II. Announcements: Ed Bonilla noted MAIC is meeting tomorrow and the outreach person for the ACLU is going to be a guest speaker to talk about their mission and goals, from 8:30 - 9:30 at the deKoven House, all are welcome to attend. Wendy Berlind announced Russell Library will be hosting a preschool information fair this Saturday, January 23rd with a snow date of January 30th. Kitty noted people may call the library in the event of snow for cancelation information. Liz Fraser announced the CT Voices for Children budget forum from will be held on January 26, 2016 from 10:00 to 12:00 with Ben Barnes presenting in the Old Judiciary Room at the Capitol. For more information, Council members may visit their website. Jim Gaudreau announced Lawrence School received funding from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Grant in the amount of \$4,000 for a home visiting program.

III. Acceptance of the Dec. 16, 2015 School Readiness Council meeting minutes: Wendy Berlind moved to accept the minutes from the above mentioned date with the word correction noted via e-mail. Donna Marino seconded. The motion carried unanimously. The corrected minutes have already been filed with the office of the town clerk.

III. Coordinator's Report: Jessica shared additional information for Council members' binders. Additional updates were made on the contact sheet and will be updated and distributed at the next meeting.

Financial and Monthly Summary Report: Jessica distributed this report and noted the 8 non-resident slots may increase to 10 in the next month. Bright & Early has filled their additional slots and Town & Country will have theirs filled by the end of January. Programs are reporting waiting lists at this time. A brief discussion followed.

State Legislative Budget Updates: As expected, the Discovery matching funds were cut and the Discovery Plan funds will be cut again by 1%.

Listening Tour Follow-Up: Jessica recapped the conversation from the December 2015 meeting and noted points of focus: discussion around doing this again and what questions will be asked. She reminded Council members that Jim suggested we use the Community Assessment Tool as a point of reference for our goal setting, so Jessica did pull from that the areas showing need for improvement.

In regard to questions from the last discussion parents' knowledge of the School Readiness Council and its function, Jessica shared information from our community School Readiness programs. South Farms informs parents at enrollment and at four parent nights throughout the year. Town & Country discusses School Readiness with only parents that receive support from the grant and it is focused on the sliding fee scale. The YMCA does a bit of educating their parents, discussing School Readiness at enrollment and noted it supports professional development for their teachers. Bright & Early gives parents the brochure and the School Readiness home page. All programs have policies within their handbooks around the School Readiness parent fee determination and other School Readiness policies. Jessica reported at a recent Providers Council meeting they discussed this and will develop steps to increase efforts to inform parents about School Readiness and the School Readiness Council.

It was noted by the School Readiness Council that knowledge of School Readiness and the function of the Council must be built before we progress with questions for future listening tours. Discussion followed. Providers did note during the listening tour that they don't know the faces of the Council members and would like to put names to faces. Jessica suggested we dedicate the upcoming March meeting as an open meeting where we invite the program directors to attend for a "meet and greet". Jim suggested we consider going to programs for an evening meeting.

The parent information evening might be a good time to connect with parents. Christine reminded the Council that parent informing is different than parent engagement. It was further noted that the School Readiness Council is the only city council that meets during the day. The two tasks at hand appear to be a need to establish relationships with providers and then establish relationships with School Readiness parents. We should begin to think about when and how to do this with providers and what will make the most sense. Jessica did mention the March meeting to providers at their Providers Council meeting and the directors were open to the suggestion. The School Readiness Council members present were receptive to that idea. It was asked what info would be shared and what would the meeting look like? Suggested conversation would include short introductions with information on why we are on the Council, followed by questions and answers on how the Council can best support the programs. Ed suggested this was a good starting point. Jessica noted providing information on budget issues would be beneficial and Liz, supporting that suggestion, noted advocacy is something that might spur interest for some people. Christine agreed that is a very good topic to bring up when directors are meeting with us. Alice noted the Council deals with more than just filling slots and that is important as an educational piece for programs. Ed asked about advocacy models to work with parents. Parent Leadership Program was noted as one. Discussion around local stories to be shared by our parents during the legislative session followed. It was noted that the YMCA program did have conversations with their parents and they made calls to the legislative representatives and senators along with other means of outreach to parents for legislative issues, but also for issues within Middletown, such as the transition to kindergarten outreach elementary principals provided to programs. Jim offered to organize those efforts again this spring. Donna noted some of the best advocacy occurs when the legislative representatives and senators come to visit our programs and see parents in action.

Next steps include planning for the March meeting with suggestions for the agenda. Developing an organizational chart of the Council was suggested. Additionally, a suggestion was made to connect Council members with programs similar to the Board of Education's adopt a school model.

Community Assessment Tool Review: Jessica noted four items that did show some need for improvement within this tool, all scoring 3s. They include:

1. Board and inclusive Collaborative
2. Community Champion/Spokesperson
3. Support of Mayor or/ Chief Elected Official
4. Parent Engagement

The Council began with the Parent Engagement component item and the following brainstorming ideas surfaced:

- Consider getting parents to understand what the Council does
- We may get a few parents by sending a letter of request.
- We might consider getting more by directors asking parents to consider attending a meeting
- Make sure parents represent the diversity of the community
- Donna has a database of parent leaders she can contact to sit on Council
- We may use the program parent boards rather than the parents here at this table
- Inviting them is important
- No one should have any reservation to ask someone to come to a School Readiness Council meeting
- We need to remember we are parents too
- There is value to going to programs' parent council meetings. It allows you to be in their forum and insert yourself Jessica will get program parent council meeting dates and times and share with the School Readiness Council
- The Even Start coordinator serving on the Council could possibly bring a parent from the program to a Council meeting and perhaps other programs could try, too
- One positive outcome: we will learn programs' parent council make-up and roles

Updates:

FRC Update: In an effort to allow for other updates and with little news, Amy gave up her time.

Voices for Families: Donna noted 25 people have signed on to participate in this new program. She is excited about it feeling it is a more intentional and local focused program. The program will include class projects.

Opportunity Knocks Update: Monica reminded the Council that the January monthly meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 26th and the focus of discussion will be on the Snap

program. The February meeting will be dedicated to thanking local dentists that participate in oral health program with a proclamation from the Mayor's office.

Child First Update: Christine noted Child First lost a clinician and as result their wait list has grown.

CRT Head Start Update: In Marla's absence, Jessica announced Head Start has two open slots at this time.

EHS Update: Alice noted Early Head Start is recruiting for 2 home visitors, information on these positions can be found on Middlesex Hospital's website. Liz can post any job on the job list serve at CAHS, just email her.

Other Updates: Liz noted the Early Childhood Alliance is developing their advocacy agenda. Focus this year will be around: greater support for infants and toddlers, paid family leave, expanding access to home visiting, diaper tax, increased rates for child care providers, living wages, and Care4Kids. Under Care4Kids, she noted forums have ended, but you can go online to comment on changes that will impact this funding (Jessica shared link with Council members via email). OEC is responding to community input. Efforts are being made to get rid of the "cliff effect" for families that eventually lose that support. In the effort to support more families for longer periods of time may create a downside - they will probably have to close the program during the year due to lack of funds. Connecticut is getting a lot of pressure to license kith 'n kin or cut the Care4Kids support to those entities. Information on this can be found on the Care4Kids website. This is an agency issue and not part of legislation.

Jessica informed the Council that AFP funding will be going to the United Way of Connecticut in Rocky, impacting the ECTC, CAEYC professional development supports and the AFP-NAEYC supports. The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) saw the United Way as a fiduciary system to distribute funds for services with a vision to do work with a Birth to 5 concept and be more efficient. This decision was done quickly the impact might not have been fully considered in the decision making process. In addition, Help Me Grow funds may also be threatened, more information will be shared with the council as it is learned.

V. Adjournment: Ed closed the meeting at 1:40P.M. thanking those present for their attendance.

**The next Middletown School Readiness Council meeting will be held on
Wednesday, February 17, 2016
at
Wilbert Snow School
299 Wadsworth St., Middletown, CT 06457
from
12:00 P.M. to 1:30 P.M.**

Respectfully Submitted by:
Sheila C. Daniels